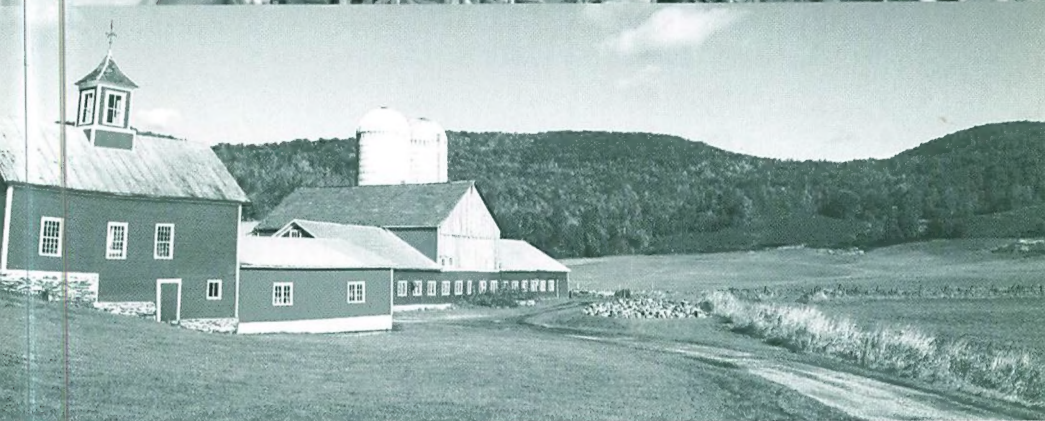
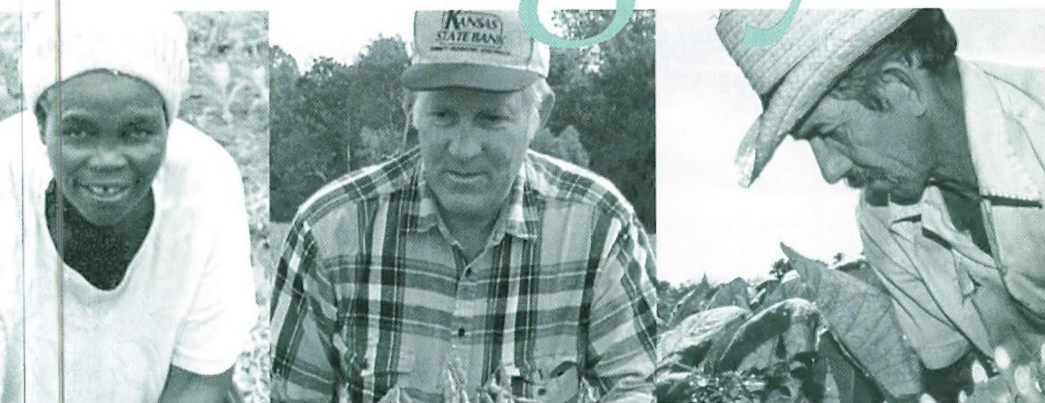


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For I was Hungry



& You Gave Me Food

Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers, and Farmworkers

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops • Washington, D.C.

The document *For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers, and Farmworkers* was developed by the Committee on Domestic Policy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). It was approved by the full body of bishops at their November 2003 General Meeting and has been authorized for publication by the undersigned.

Msgr. William P. Fay
General Secretary, USCCB

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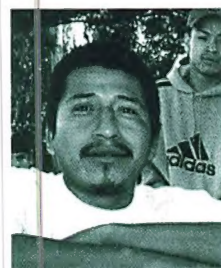
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The title is a quote from Matthew 25:35.

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Pastoral Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

As Catholic bishops, pastors, and teachers, we seek to address agriculture through the lens of our faith because so much is at stake in moral and human terms. Food sustains life itself; it is not just another product. Providing food for all is a Gospel imperative, not just another policy choice. For many, farming is a way of life, not just another business or industry. Agriculture is the way farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers provide a decent life for their families and help feed a hungry world. It is not just another economic activity.

Agriculture is different because it touches all our lives, wherever we live or whatever we do. It is about how we feed our own families, and the whole human family. It is about how we treat those who put food on our table and those who do not have enough food. It is about what is happening to food and farming, rural communities and villages, in the face of increasing concentration, new technology, and growing globalization in agriculture. For Catholics, who turn to the Scripture and church teaching for guidance, and for all believers, these questions and choices in the world of agriculture have fundamental ethical and human dimensions.

Too many in our Church and nation do not know the world of agriculture. For some, agriculture is a distant reality, little seen and less understood. When we go to the supermarket, we rarely think about where our food comes from, who produces it, who harvests it, or what it takes to process, package, and distribute it. When many of us think about agriculture at all, we worry about the economic cost of groceries and not the environmental cost to our land or the human cost to farmers, farmworkers, and rural communities in the United States and around the world.

II. OUR PURPOSES AND KEY QUESTIONS

In these reflections, we seek to challenge this lack of awareness, which can lead to indifference or excessive self-interest. We focus on the ethics of how food and fiber are produced, how land is protected, and how agriculture is structured, compensated, and regulated to serve the “common good.” We

U.S. Agriculture: What Is Happening to Farms and Farmers?

Scale. In 2001 there were an estimated 2.16 million U.S. farms,¹ down from approximately 5.5 million in 1950;² 10% of these farms account for nearly 70% of all agriculture production.³

Farm Support Programs. Recent studies show that approximately two-thirds of subsidies go to just 10% of farms. In fact, most fresh produce in supermarkets is grown without subsidies and livestock producers are ineligible for most government payments, though they do benefit indirectly from grain subsidies.⁴ From 1999 to 2001, agricultural support in the developed countries totaled \$329.6 billion. The U.S. share totaled \$95.5 billion, while the European Union's share was \$112.7 billion.⁵ Over the same time period, U.S. agricultural support was more than three times the amount of U.S. foreign economic and humanitarian assistance. U.S. farm supports will significantly increase in the future due to the passage of the 2002 farm bill.

Health and Safety. Of more than 41 million uninsured people in the United States, one in five lives in rural areas. They are older, poorer, and less healthy than people living in urban areas.⁶ The 2002 occupational fatality rate in agriculture was 22.7 per 100,000 people employed, compared to 12.2 in construction, 11.3 in transportation, and 23.5 in mining.⁷

1 National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS) (2002), 23.

2 Bread for the World, *Agriculture in the Global Economy, Hunger* 2003, 36.

3 U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Food and Agricultural Policy: Taking Stock of the New Century* (September 2001), Appendix 1, Table A-1.

4 Congressional Quarterly, *Farm Subsidies: Do They Favor Large Farming Operations?* 12:19 (May 17, 2002): 436-437.

5 World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects* (2004), 120.

6 The Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kaiser Commission on Key Facts* (April 2003).

7 U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, *Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries* (2002).

also call Catholics to think more about and act on these important but often neglected concerns in light of our faith.

In this document, we outline some “signs of the times,” lift up principles from Catholic social teaching, and suggest elements of an “agenda for action.” We also highlight the global dimensions of agriculture today and how they

contribute to the growing gap between rich and poor at home and abroad. But more than anything else, we seek to place *the life and dignity of the human person* at the center of the discussions and decisions on agriculture.

We offer these reflections especially to three groups:

First, we recognize and encourage those who carry out and contribute to the work of agriculture in the United States and abroad: farmers and farmworkers, leaders of rural communities, and those who serve them in our Church. When we refer to farmers and farmworkers, our concern also extends to those who produce our food and fiber, to ranchers, and to other agricultural workers. For all those who devote their lives to agriculture, we offer words of support and appreciation, as well as a plea to work together more cooperatively and constructively for the common good.

Second, we offer elements of a moral framework for those involved in agricultural policy: political leaders, experts, advocates, and activists. We urge them to look at agricultural choices and at how these choices touch the most vulnerable within agriculture and in the larger national and global community.

Third, we encourage members of the broader Catholic community to give greater attention and priority to issues of food and agriculture and their connections to our faith.

We hope these reflections will contribute to a broader dialogue about the ethical and human dimensions of agricultural policy. We invite those involved in and those affected by the global agricultural system to consider several key questions:

- How can hunger in the human family be overcome?
- How can we ensure a safe, affordable, and sustainable food supply?
- How can we ensure that farmworkers and owners of small farms, in the United States and around the world, live and work with dignity?
- How can land, water, and other elements of God's creation be preserved, protected, and used well in the service of the common good?
- How can rural communities in our country and around the world survive and thrive?

We cannot ignore these questions or leave the answers only to those directly involved in agriculture. They touch all of us.

III. AGRICULTURAL “SIGNS OF THE TIMES”

The agricultural “signs of the times” are complex and sometimes contradictory. Since our Conference last addressed these questions,¹ much has remained the same. U.S. agriculture has demonstrated remarkable productivity and quality, thanks to the hard work, skills, and sacrifices of farmers and farmworkers. U.S. agriculture has given Americans and the world plentiful food, fiber, and other products at affordable prices. However, we live in a world where many are still hungry. We live in a nation where many family farmers are still struggling and where many have lost farms in recent decades. We live in a society where many farmworkers are still denied the opportunity to live a decent life.

We are also facing new challenges: for example, increasing concentration at every level of agriculture, increasing focus on agricultural trade as a measure of economic vitality, and increasing globalization tying together our lives and livelihoods wherever we live. (See data box “U.S. Agriculture: What Is Happening to Farms and Farmers?” and data box “Global Agriculture: What Is Happening to Hungry People and Farmers Around the World?”) Fewer people are making important decisions that affect far more people than in the past. These choices have serious moral implications and human consequences. These forces of increasing concentration and growing globalization are pushing some ahead and leaving others behind. They are also pushing us toward a world where the powerful can take advantage of the weak, where large institutions and corporations can overwhelm smaller structures, and where the production and distribution of food and the protection of land lie in fewer hands. (See data box “Concentration and Vertical Integration: What Is Happening to Our Food from Field to Shelf?”)

With these reflections, we offer brief summaries of trends and relevant statistics. They are not a comprehensive analysis of the forces at work in agriculture. They focus more on problems than progress, more on human costs than economic achievements, more on who is left behind than on who is moving ahead. Beyond the numbers are images and contrasts that haunt us:

- We return home from the supermarket with its many choices and turn on the television to watch a young girl half a world away pick through a garbage dump for something, anything to eat.
- We know U.S. agriculture is changing in so many ways, but farmers still depend on whether it rains and on other forces of nature.



- We are urged to eat foods that promote health, but most of us never think about the health and safety of those who harvest those fruits and vegetables. We are stunned by the headlines when eighteen people die in a tractor trailer in Victoria, Texas, or in a desert, people who came seeking a better life, hoping to work in our fields.
- We have learned that more than half of the coffee industry's permanent labor force has lost jobs as world coffee prices plummeted, affecting tens of thousands of workers and farmers throughout Central America.
- We celebrate the hard work and sacrifice of so many farm families and the traditional community values in rural towns. However, many of us do not realize how these virtues and values are sometimes threatened by powerful economic interests and other forces that make it more and more difficult for smaller farms and communities to survive and thrive.
- We heard the sad story at one of our listening sessions of a mother in Zimbabwe who stood in line for days to get food for her two young children. As she waited, she watched both children die.

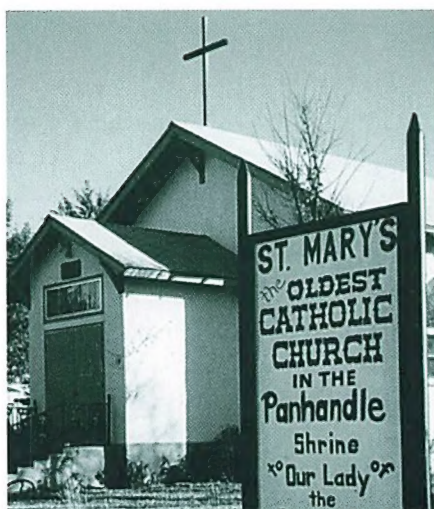
IV. OUR FAITH TRADITION

Because we are a community of faith, our response to these realities and trends in agriculture is shaped by the truths of the Scripture and the principles of Catholic social teaching, not just by economics or politics.

Scripture

When believers think about agriculture, we begin with the story of Creation. “God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good” (Gn 1:31). Those who provide our food are called to continue God’s plan for creation.

Throughout the Scripture, we hear of an enduring vision of “new heavens and a new earth” (Is 65:17) where God’s justice will reign (cf. 2 Pt 3:12, Rev 21:1). The Old Testament calls us to care for the land and provide for those who need food, especially those who are poor and outcast. The tradition of the Sabbath Year is one example: “But during the seventh year the land shall have a complete rest, a sabbath for the LORD, when you may neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard” (Lv 25:4). God explains to Moses that the land should be used to provide food for all who need it: “While the land has its sabbath, all its produce will be food equally for you yourself and . . . for your hired help and the tenants who live with you . . .” (Lv 25:6).



Time and again Jesus warned us against selfishness and greed and called us to feed the hungry and show special concern for those who are poor. In the story of the Last Judgment, Jesus reminds us that one of the fundamental measures of our lives will be how we cared for people in need: “For I was hungry and you gave me food” (Mt 25:35).

The Word of God provides direction for our lives. The Church has applied these values and directions in developing a body of doctrine

Concentration and Vertical Integration: What Is Happening to Our Food from Field to Shelf?

Food Retail. In 1997, the top five food retailers held 24% of the U.S. market; by 2000 that share increased to 42% of retail food sales.¹

Livestock. Today the four largest beef firms process 81% of all the cattle; the four largest pork firms process 59% of pork; and four chicken firms process 50% of all broilers.²

Grains. The four largest wheat processors have 61% of the market; the four largest soybean processors have 80% of the market.³

1 Mary Hendrickson, William Heffernan, Philip Howard, and Judith Heffernan, Executive Summary, Report to National Farmers Union, *Consolidation in Food Retailing and Dairy: Implications for Farmers and Consumers in a Global Food System* (January 8, 2001).

2 William Heffernan, *Multi-National Concentrated Food Processing and Marketing Systems and the Farm Crisis*, 7. A paper presented to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, February 14-19, 2002.

3 *Multi-National Concentrated Food Processing*, 7.

known as Catholic social teaching. This teaching provides helpful guidance for our choices as individuals and as a society on issues such as agriculture. To assess the global agricultural system in the light of our faith, we need to understand the core principles of Catholic social teaching.

Catholic Social Teaching

The essential starting point for Catholic social teaching is the dignity of every human life. Created by God and redeemed by Christ, every person possesses a fundamental dignity that comes from God, not from any human attribute or accomplishment. Because each person's life is a sacred gift from God, all people have a right to life that must be defended and protected from its beginning to its end. The dignity of every person must always be respected because each person is a precious child of God. In light of our commitment to the right to life of every person, we believe all people also have basic rights to material and spiritual support, including the right to food, which are required to sustain life and to live a truly human existence. This clear commitment to the dignity and value of every human life must be reflected both in individual choices and actions and in the policies and structures of society.

Linked to the dignity of human life is our understanding of the social nature of the person. As the creation narratives tell us, we are made in the image of a Triune God and we are created in relationship to God and to each other. Our inherently social nature means that the structures of social, political, and economic life must reflect basic respect for the dignity of every human person as well as a commitment to the common good. This begins with a deep commitment to the family as the foundation of society. It also leads to the principle of solidarity, the understanding that as children of God we are all brothers and sisters, no matter how different or distant we may seem. The Book of Genesis highlights the central relationship between humankind and the rest of creation, which deserves our care and protection.

Our commitment to the dignity of every person requires special concern for those who are poor and vulnerable, whose needs are greatest, and whose lives and dignity are often threatened by hunger, poverty, and suffering. In order for people to live a life worthy of their God-given dignity, Catholic social teaching affirms the right and duty to work, the right to economic initiative, the rights of workers to safe working conditions, decent wages and benefits, and the right to organize and join associations to secure these rights.

In light of these principles, our Conference will continue to advocate for policies that protect and encourage family farming on a human scale. We also insist that all agriculture, whatever its scale or structure, must meet fundamental moral criteria. Agriculture in all its forms should be evaluated, regulated, and rewarded based on these principles.

The brief overview we have offered here does not begin to do justice to the depth and richness of the Catholic social tradition. We hope Catholics and others will review the summary of key themes of Catholic social teaching that are a part of this document, as well as the papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents that express this teaching in its fullness.

A farm or agricultural system that ignores economic realities is in financial trouble. An agricultural system or enterprise that ignores or neglects moral principles is in ethical trouble. We wish to recognize and applaud so many farm families and others who live by these principles every day. For them, farming is not just a way to make a living; it is a way of life. It is not just a job; it is a vocation and an expression of faith.

V. RESPONDING IN FAITH

Meeting Pastoral Needs

The Catholic Church has a pastoral presence throughout rural America and in rural communities around the globe. Within our community of faith, farmers and farmworkers, land owners and contract growers, business owners and workers are called to the one Eucharistic table to be nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ.

Throughout history, rural parishes have built a sense of community, nurturing the spiritual and sacramental lives of their people, and offering formation and faith development programs. Rural parishes and many dioceses have sponsored schools, provided health care, supported community activities, and offered essential services for people in need. As rural populations diminish and the resources available in rural communities decrease, the role of the Church and those who serve it becomes even more important.

Priests, deacons, religious, and other pastoral workers are often the first people to whom farm and ranch families turn when they experience stress from economic and social forces beyond their control. Rural pastors and pastoral workers serve, comfort, and stand with their people, build and form community, and care for the needy in the face of many challenges. Some priests travel long distances to meet sacramental needs. Diocesan clergy, women and men religious, and volunteers also regularly travel to rural communities and farm labor camps to provide opportunities for adult faith formation, prepare believers to receive the sacraments, and join in the celebration of the Eucharist. They often serve as counselors and advocates, responding to family separation, fears about immigration status, and exploitation.



Rural America: What Is Happening to Rural Communities and Culture?

Scale. In 1999, net farm cash income was \$55.7 billion, while other sources of income contributed \$124 billion to the total income of farm families.¹ Most rural counties do not depend on agriculture for their economies; on average, seven of eight rural counties derive income from a mix of farming, manufacturing, services, and other activities.²

Rural Poverty. Poverty in rural areas has been consistent for the last 40 years, with rates of 20% or more in the rural South, Appalachia, the Ozarks, the Mississippi Delta, and the Rio Grande Valley.³ Poverty rates in most agriculturally-based counties in six of the major agriculture-producing states (Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota) are greater than in the metropolitan counties in those states; the rates in the smallest agriculturally-based counties are 60% higher.⁴

Culture. Studies for the past 50 years show a correlation between a growing concentration in agriculture and a loss of businesses and civic society in rural towns. Fewer farms and ranches mean fewer agricultural support services and farm-related businesses, since larger and more intensive farms can deal directly with national or global agribusiness. Fewer farm families mean fewer children in rural schools, fewer community services, and fewer churches; the average age of a farmer is estimated to be about 55 years.⁵

1 U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Food and Agricultural Policy: Taking Stock of the New Century* (September 2001), 4.

2 *Food and Agricultural Policy*, 12.

3 *Food and Agricultural Policy*, 90.

4 Jon M. Bailey and Kim Preston, for the Center for Rural Affairs, *Swept Away: Chronic Hardship and Fresh Promise on the Rural Great Plains* (June 2003), 1.

5 U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1997 Census of Agriculture, Table 1.

Around the world, the Catholic Church provides essential relief and development assistance in rural communities that are home to some of the poorest people on earth. Catholic programs provide emergency assistance in times of crisis and support a wide range of ongoing human, economic, and agricultural development projects.

We wish to express our deep gratitude for the hard work and dedication of those who serve in rural parishes and dioceses in the United States and around

the world. They are supported by the work of many diocesan programs and national organizations.² We hope this statement will be a source of affirmation, support, and encouragement to continue their essential service to the Church and rural communities.

Criteria for Agricultural Policy and Advocacy

Beyond meeting pastoral needs, the Catholic community has a responsibility to raise the ethical dimensions of issues that shape rural life and agricultural policy. As a Vatican statement on public life states, the Church has a “right and duty to provide a moral judgment on temporal matters”³ and to “instruct and illuminate the consciences of the faithful, particularly those involved in political life, so that their actions may always serve the integral promotion of the human person and the common good.”⁴

As bishops, we shall continue to share Catholic social teaching, to apply it to the ethical and human dimensions of agricultural issues, and to bring our values to agricultural decision making. We hope that Catholics throughout our country, in urban, suburban, and rural areas, will join in the effort to promote a food and agricultural system more focused on overcoming hunger, providing a decent living for farmers and farmworkers, and protecting the earth and its resources. Drawing on Catholic social teaching and the experience of the Church in rural communities, we offer criteria that should guide agricultural policy.

Overcoming Hunger and Poverty. The presence of so much hunger and poverty in our communities, nation, and around the world is a grave moral scandal. The primary goals of agricultural policies should be providing food for all people and reducing poverty among farmers and farmworkers in this country and abroad. A key measure of every agricultural program and legislative initiative is whether it helps the most vulnerable farmers, farmworkers, and their families and whether it contributes to a global food system that provides basic nutrition for all.

Providing a Safe, Affordable, and Sustainable Food Supply. Agricultural systems in the United States have been remarkably successful in providing sufficient, safe, and affordable food for consumers. These strengths should be directed toward serving better the needs and interests of hungry and poor people in the United States and abroad. Caring for land and water resources has become an increasingly important focus within U.S. agriculture. Farmers

should expand the use of environmentally sustainable methods so that farmland in the United States can provide food for generations to come. We are concerned that as a society we continue to lose productive farm land for development as communities and transportation expand. In other parts of the world, agricultural and food supply systems also need to be strengthened. An important measure of international trade and agricultural policies should be how they promote safe and affordable food and sustainable, environmentally sound farming practices.

Ensuring a Decent Life for Farmers and Farmworkers. Food can remain safe and affordable without sacrificing the incomes, health, or lives of farmers and farmworkers. Catholic social teaching insists that all workers deserve wages and benefits sufficient to support a family and live a decent life. Farmers must be able to support themselves and their families through their work and to provide for important needs such as health care and retirement. Farmers and their employees receive less and less of every dollar spent on food.⁵ This is a matter of justice that should be addressed. Agricultural policies must take into consideration the risks associated with farming that are beyond a farmer's control, such as weather and changes in global markets. Trade policies should better reflect the right to economic opportunity of all farmers wherever they may live. Agricultural policies should help ensure basic income security and provide opportunities for economic initiative for farmers in the United States and throughout the world, with special attention to small producers.

Likewise, public policies must address the needs of agricultural workers. A key measure of agricultural, immigration, and labor policies is whether they reflect fundamental respect for the dignity, rights, and safety of agricultural workers and whether they help agricultural workers to provide a decent life for themselves and their families. (See data box "Agricultural Workers: What Is Happening to Those Who Harvest and Process Our Food?")

Sustaining and Strengthening Rural Communities. In rural areas of the United States and throughout the world, small towns and villages are the backbone of social and economic life. As rural populations decline and rural economies suffer, basic structures of rural life are at risk. Public policies should encourage a wide variety of economic development strategies in rural areas. They should continue to promote and support farming, especially family farms, as a strategy for rural development. Likewise, the practices and policies of Catholic institutions on leasing and ownership of farmland should be consistent with our principles, especially in the area of encouraging young people to

enter farming. A key measure of agricultural and development policies is whether they encourage widespread diversity in farm ownership and advance rural development in this country and abroad, promoting and maintaining the culture and values of rural communities. (See data box “Rural America: What Is Happening to Rural Communities and Culture?”).

Protecting God’s Creation. Care for God’s creation is a central calling for believers. Agricultural and food policies should reward practices that protect human life, encourage soil conservation, improve water quality, protect wildlife, and maintain the diversity of the ecosystem. An essential measure of agricultural and food policies is whether they protect the environment and its diversity and promote sustainable agricultural practices in the United States and abroad. (See data box “Agriculture and Environment: What Is Happening to Land and Water?”)

Expanding Participation. To achieve an agricultural system consistent with these criteria, widespread participation and dialogue in the development of agricultural policies should be encouraged. Truly effective policies will be developed when people who are most affected have adequate information, time, and opportunities for real contributions to legislation, regulations, programs, and trade agreements.

These six criteria provide a framework for measuring policies related to agriculture in light of Catholic social teaching and the requirements of the common good. They are not comprehensive, nor do they suggest predictable positions on important issues. We hope they will encourage serious, thoughtful debate and dialogue on U.S. agricultural policy, the global agricultural system, and the impact both have on human dignity. As our contribution to this discussion, we offer an “Agenda for Action” that seeks to apply these criteria to key agricultural policies.

Members of the Catholic community can differ about the specific application of these criteria. We come to these issues from very different perspectives: as farmers and farmworkers, landowners and contract growers, business operators and workers, producers, processors, and consumers. But as Catholics we share a fundamental concern for human life and dignity and a basic commitment to the common good. As bishops, we invite Catholics and others to use these criteria to explore, discuss, and advocate for agricultural policies that protect human life and dignity and advance the well-being of all God’s creation.

VI. TOWARD COMMITMENT, HOPE, AND CHALLENGE

Continuing Commitment

As a result of the listening sessions and dialogues that led to these reflections, we call upon the standing committees of our Conference (the Committees on Domestic Policy, International Policy, and Migration) to continue educating the Catholic community, policy makers, and the larger society about the ethical dimensions of agriculture and to follow through on our recommendations and policies with new urgency and priority. The wide range of concerns raised in our listening sessions requires the Conference to continue integrating the issues of agriculture into the agendas of its various committees and structures. We believe that this strategy of integration and collaboration will ensure a sustained, comprehensive, and necessary approach to pastoral care, policy development, and advocacy on issues of food, agriculture, trade, and international assistance.

A Word of Hope

Fundamentally, food and agriculture are about life: life for the hungry and for all who depend on farmers and farmworkers for what we eat every day. But they are also about life for farmworkers who risk their health to pick our food, sometimes not knowing what pesticides are in the field. They are about life for subsistence farmers in Africa trying to feed a family and make a meager living. They are about a way of life for farm families in the United States who are unable to meet debt payments and face selling a farm that has been in the family for generations. These reflections call all of us to make the protection of life and dignity the foundation of our choices on agriculture. We know these are not easy times, but as believers we have hope for the days ahead:

- We have the capacity to overcome hunger in our nation and around the world. What an achievement that would be!
- We stand with farmers, particularly those who own small and family farms here and abroad, in their struggle to live with dignity, to preserve a way of life, and to strengthen rural communities.
- We insist that agricultural workers be treated with dignity—decent wages, safe working conditions, and a real voice in the workplace.
- We advocate care for creation to protect the fields and streams, which are gifts of God.
- We find in our faith—the lessons of Genesis, the passion of the prophets, and the words and life of Jesus—the ultimate source of hope.



The Challenge Ahead

Through the eyes of faith, these tasks are not options, but obligations. The Catholic community is discovering with new urgency that our faith calls us to strengthen our presence and witness, our advocacy and action in defense of the human life and dignity of hungry people, farmers and farmworkers, and God's creation.

Our Conference has called all Catholics to work to ensure *A Place at the Table*⁶ for all God's children. Agriculture is at the heart of this moral challenge. As we have pointed out:

- A table is where families gather for food, but some have little food or no table at all.
- A table is where leaders gather in government and international negotiations and other forums to make decisions on trade and aid, subsidies and access. But some have no real voice at these tables.
- For Catholics, the table is the altar at which we gather for Eucharist to transform "the fruit of the vine and work of human hands" into the Body and Blood of Christ. It is also the table from which we are sent forth to secure "a place at the table" for all.

We cannot secure a place at the table for all without a more just agricultural system. Some small farmers are losing their place at the table. Some farmworkers never had a place. And so many people in our own land and around the world, seeking to feed their children, have no real place at that table. The moral measure of our efforts is how our community of faith works together to secure a place at the table of life for all God's children.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND AGRICULTURE

Catholic social teaching offers important values and principles for assessing policies and programs related to agriculture. The following brief summaries of key themes of Catholic social teaching are not comprehensive. They offer an overview of principles that have shaped our current reflections on agricultural policies. We urge the reader to become familiar with the original documents that have developed and expressed Catholic social thought over time.⁷

I. Protecting Human Life and Dignity—The Right to Food

The Catholic Church proclaims the central truth that every human person is sacred. Created in God's image and likeness and redeemed by the death and resurrection of Christ, every person has fundamental human dignity that comes from God, not from any human attribute or accomplishment.

Every person has a right to life and to the material and spiritual support required to live a truly human existence. The right to a truly human life logically leads to the right to enough food to sustain a life with dignity. The poverty and hunger that diminish the lives of millions in our own land and in so many other countries are fundamental threats to human life and dignity and demand a response from believers.

II. Social Nature of the Person—The Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The human person is not only sacred but also social. Each person lives and develops in community. Our inherently social nature makes pursuit of the "common good" an important goal and measure of society. The way we organize society economically and politically, including the way our agricultural system is structured, impacts human dignity. In our tradition, justice has three key dimensions:

commutative, distributive, and social. *Commutative justice* demands fairness in all relations and exchanges. But this must be understood in the context of both *distributive justice*, which requires that the benefits of social, economic, and political life reach all people, including those on the margins of society, and *social justice*, which insists that all people have opportunities for participation and authentic human development. All three of these dimensions of justice must shape decisions about the global agricultural system.

Catholic teaching's focus on justice and the social nature of the person emphasizes family, community, solidarity and cooperation, and the need for people to participate effectively in the decisions that affect their lives. Rural communities and cultures, with their focus on family life, community, and close ties to the land, serve as welcome signs of these social dimensions of Catholic teaching.

III. Option for and with the Poor and Vulnerable

While Catholic teaching calls us to seek the common good of the entire human family, Scripture and our Catholic tradition also call us to a priority concern for the poor and vulnerable. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, Jesus calls us to care for the powerless and those on the margins of society. For us, hungry children, farmworkers, and farmers in distress are not abstract issues. They are sisters and brothers with their own God-given dignity. In the words of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, they are also "Jesus in his distressing disguise."

Our care and concern extend in a special way to those who work in agriculture here and abroad. While some are doing well, others are vulnerable or struggling and poor. Those who farm, work in the fields or on ranches, and

process our food must have decent wages and a decent life. Agricultural trade practices with poorer countries must be fair and must seek to protect the dignity of farmers in those countries. An important moral measure of the global agricultural system is how its weakest participants are treated.

IV. Dignity of Work and the Rights and Duties of Workers and Owners

We believe that the economy, including the agricultural economy, must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living. Catholic teaching on the dignity of work calls us to engage in productive work and supports the right to decent and fair wages, health care, and time off. Workers have a right to organize to protect these rights, to choose to join a union, and to have a voice in the workplace. Employers are obligated to treat their workers with dignity, providing decent wages, safe working conditions, and humane living conditions.

Our tradition also supports responsible economic freedom, initiative, and creativity at the service of the common good. The Church has long defended the right to private ownership of productive property. Widespread ownership is a social good that must be promoted and protected. We must help families to maintain their farms and help others to begin farming. Our Catholic social tradition also speaks of a "social mortgage" on property, a concept that calls for responsible stewardship for the sake of the larger good of society and creation.

V. Solidarity

Solidarity is both a principle of Catholic social teaching and a virtue to practice. We live in a shrinking world. Disease, economic forces, capital, and labor cross national boundaries; so must our care for all the children of God. We are part of one human family, wherever we live. Starvation and widespread hunger indict us as believers. It may be tempting to turn away from the world and its many challenges. However,

the Gospel and our Catholic heritage point to another way, a way that sees others as sisters and brothers, no matter how different or how far away they are. Agriculture today is a global reality in a world that is not just a market. It is the home of one human family.

Our interdependence, as expressed by the principle of solidarity, leads us to support the development of organizations and institutions at the local, national, and international levels. Solidarity is complemented by the concept of subsidiarity, which reminds us of the limitations and responsibilities of these organizations and institutions. Subsidiarity defends the freedom of initiative of every member of society and affirms the essential role of these various structures. In the words of John Paul II, subsidiarity asserts that "a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good."⁸ In the case of agriculture, solidarity and subsidiarity lead us to support and promote smaller, family-run farms not only to produce food, but also to provide a livelihood for families and to form the foundation of rural communities.

VI. Respect for Creation

All creation is a gift. Scripture tells us that "the earth is the Lord's, and all it holds" (Ps 24:1). All of us, especially those closest to the land, are called to a special reverence and respect for God's creation. Nurturing and tilling the soil, harnessing the power of water to grow food, and caring for animals are forms of this stewardship. The Church has repeatedly taught that the misuse of God's creation betrays the gift God has given us for the good of the entire human family. While rural communities are uniquely dependent on land, water, and weather, stewardship is a responsibility of our entire society.



A Catholic Agenda for Action: Pursuing A More Justified Agricultural System

The Catholic community brings to our consideration of agricultural policies the teaching of our Church and the everyday experience of our community of faith in rural communities in the United States and abroad. In light of this teaching and experience, we reiterate the criteria for policies that shape our advocacy:

- Do these policies help to overcome hunger and poverty?
- Do they provide a safe, affordable, and sustainable food supply?
- Do they ensure a just and decent life for farmers and farmworkers?
- Do they sustain and strengthen rural communities?
- Do they protect God's creation?
- Do those affected by agricultural policies have a real opportunity to participate in their development?

Our criteria lead us to focus attention on several key policy areas. We realize that taking positions on these issues involves prudential judgments and that people of good will may disagree about the application of Catholic principles to specific policies. We hope our reflections will encourage widespread discussion and dialogue on issues related to agriculture and their impact on human life, human dignity, and the common good.

I. U.S. FARMERS AND FARM POLICIES

Catholic teaching about the dignity of work insists that farmers must be able to support themselves and their families through their work. This means that they must be able to survive fluctuations in the market and the risks associated with production. We recognize the great pain and stress experienced when a family loses its farm, as so many have in recent years. Their loss is our loss. Those who live and work in rural areas, especially those who have the fewest resources, depend on small towns to make the transactions of daily life possible without the expense and inconvenience of traveling long distances. For some rural communities to survive economically, there must be enough farm families in the surrounding area to support local businesses. The suffering that accompanies the loss of farms is paralleled by the pain of lost

businesses and the struggles of small towns when concentration of the agricultural sector leads to fewer and fewer small and moderate-sized farms. We are concerned that the continuing concentration in the ownership of land and resources and in the marketing and distribution of food leaves control in the hands of too few and diminishes effective participation.

Policies and programs are needed that encourage rural development, promoting and maintaining the culture and values of rural communities. These should include policies that encourage a wide range of economic development strategies, especially by fostering the entrepreneurial spirit of rural people and investing in their education and training. They also should include policies that promote and support farming, support the efforts of farmers to establish co-ops and other cooperative ventures, and encourage widespread diversity in farm ownership. Limited government resources for subsidies and other forms of support should be targeted to small and moderate-sized farms, especially minority-owned farms, to help them through difficult times caused by changes in global agricultural markets or weather patterns that destroy crops. Agricultural subsidies often go to a few large producers, while smaller family farms struggle to survive. Rather than simply rewarding production, which can lead to surpluses and falling prices, government resources should reward environmentally sound and sustainable farming practices. Because of rising land prices, the cost of sophisticated equipment, and the difficulty of making a living, government resources are also needed to help new farmers and ranchers enter the field of agriculture.

Resources should be targeted towards research that helps smaller farms remain viable and promotes environmentally sound agriculture. Programs that provide affordable insurance protection are essential so that farm families can start again if crops fail. In the wholesale and retail sectors of the food supply system, we favor policies that promote greater competition so that farmers can receive a fair price for their goods.

II. U.S. AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

Farmworkers have been among the most visible concerns of our Conference. We renew the commitment to lift up their situation and to work to improve their lives and those of their families. They are among the most vulnerable and exploited people in our land. Their situation demands a response from people of faith.

New Technologies, New Questions: What Are the Opportunities and Problems in New Agricultural Technologies?

Scale. The United States accounts for approximately 66% of all the world's genetically engineered crops. In 2001, 66% of both cotton and soybean acreage planted in the United States and 25% of corn acreage were genetically modified.¹

Market. The ten largest agrochemical companies accounted for 82% of sales in 1996; six agrochemical companies are the major producers of agricultural chemicals today.²

1 P. G. Pardey and N. M. Beintema, for International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Food Policy Report, *Slow Magic: Agricultural R&D: A Century After Mendel* (October 2001), 19.

2 Andrew Burchette, "Family Tree," *Farm Journal* (February 2002).

Agricultural workers are low wage earners. The seasonal nature of their work and the inadequacy of the minimum wage keep most living in poverty. We affirm our support for an increase in the minimum wage for all workers. In addition, the hourly pay of agricultural workers should be increased, and enforcement mechanisms should be available to ensure that they receive just pay and benefits. These agricultural workers, who work long hours during a seasonal period, should have overtime pay as a measure of justice. Payment methods such as "piece rates" should not be used to prevent workers from earning a just wage.

A living wage for agricultural workers could help their families live a just and decent life, help to stabilize the workforce, and stimulate rural communities without significantly impacting food prices domestically and internationally. Since most benefits generally are not available to them as part of an employment package, federal, state, and local laws should be amended to ensure that all workers are entitled to health care, unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, and Social Security. In addition, agricultural workers' low wages and the scarcity of affordable housing in rural areas make it essential that funding for housing be increased.

To participate fully in the community where they reside and work, farmworkers and their families need access to services and mobility in those



communities. We are encouraged by the enactment of laws in several states, supported by many state Catholic conferences, that would provide to undocumented immigrants access to in-state tuition rates and driver's licenses.

Agricultural labor involves some of the most dangerous jobs in the United States, with workers exposed to harsh working conditions, pesticides and other chemicals, and long hours of labor-intensive work. Labor protections are currently inadequate; for those protections that do exist in law, enforcement is random and ineffective. Labor protections for agricultural workers should be guaranteed in law, consistent with protections for other workers in the country. The law must also be amended to allow workers to challenge in civil court employers who do not provide sanitary and safe working conditions, who violate wage and hour laws, or who use dangerous pesticides. Working conditions should be consistent with appropriate federal standards. Agricultural workers should enjoy the same protections as other U.S. workers, including the right to join together to have a voice in the workplace and bargain with their employers.

In some cases, agricultural employers use labor contractors to hire workers with the intent of protecting themselves from liability for hazardous and unjust working conditions. Enforcement of the Fair Labor Standards Act

(FLSA) and the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Protection Act (AWPA) should be strengthened to ensure that both employers and labor contractors are held responsible for the treatment of workers. Nations should not seek a trade advantage by mistreating working people, including agricultural workers.

We renew our call for a comprehensive legalization program that would permit hard-working undocumented workers in agricultural industries to adjust their legal status to legal permanent residency. A legalization program would help stabilize the workforce, protect migrant workers and their families from discrimination and exploitation, and ensure that these workers are able to continue making contributions to society. It would also give them the opportunity to enjoy the benefit of labor laws and protections and to better assert their labor rights. We would support a legalization program that requires prospective employment in order to qualify for permanent residency, provided that the work requirements are achievable and verifiable for all eligible laborers.

We have been skeptical of large-scale "guestworker" programs, such as the *Bracero* program, which have led to abuse and exploitation of workers. We recognize that, as an alternative to widespread undocumented migration, a just and fair legal pathway must be established that protects the basic labor rights of foreign-born workers. A temporary worker program must guarantee wage levels and benefits that are sufficient to support a family, include worker protections and job and benefit portability that other U.S. workers have, and allow for family unity. It also must protect domestic workers from job loss and grant workers the ability to move easily and securely between the United States and their homelands. This kind of program requires strong enforcement mechanisms to protect workers' rights and to give them the option to become lawful permanent residents after a specific amount of time.



Agricultural Workers: What Is Happening to Those Who Harvest and Process Our Food?

Scale. Approximately 1.8 million farmworkers live in the United States, 80% of whom are foreign-born and more than 50% of whom are undocumented. The percentage of foreign-born agricultural workers has grown from about 60% to 80% of the workforce in the past 20 years; the majority are Mexican.¹

Conditions. On average, the real wage rates of agricultural workers have declined nearly 20% over the past ten years, resulting in a poverty rate of approximately 60%.

¹ Department of Labor, Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey, *A Demographic and Employment Profile of the United States Farmworkers* (March 2000), 5.

A comprehensive legalization program and a temporary or migrant worker program that protects workers and gives them a path to residency would help reduce the number of undocumented agricultural workers and ensure that they are treated with respect and dignity. Legalization of current and future workers would also help reduce the incidence of smuggling and the deaths of migrant workers. We welcome the ongoing efforts of representatives of farmworkers and agricultural employers to seek common ground on these issues and to bring about legislation that positively impacts the lives of farmworkers and their families. For decades we have encouraged workable alternatives to the unjust status quo, which hurts both groups and diminishes us as a nation. We continue to oppose any program that lacks adequate, effective, and enforceable protections for workers and fails to give them an opportunity for permanent residency and an option for citizenship if they so choose.

III. INTERNATIONAL TRADE, AID, AND DEVELOPMENT

Catholic teaching requires us to pay special attention to our brothers and sisters who are suffering in extreme poverty around the world, many of whom live in rural areas. We seek measures that address the needs and interests of small farm owners and farmworkers—both overseas and in the United States. As a strategy for global poverty reduction, international trade with developed nations, if guided by principles of justice, may do far more for poor countries

than all foreign aid. While we support targeted subsidies and other programs for small and moderate-sized farms in the United States (especially those most at risk), we also recognize that greater access to local, regional, and international markets is essential for agricultural development in poor countries. Current U.S. and European subsidies, supports, tariffs, quotas, and other barriers that undermine market access for poorer countries should be substantially reduced and should be focused on policies that minimize the direct and indirect effects on prices of agricultural goods. The process of reducing these trade barriers will not be easy. It must take into account the time needed for farmers and farmworkers in developed countries to adjust, while recognizing the need to reduce the negative effects of agricultural trade barriers on struggling farmers in poor countries around the world. Our goal should be to minimize harm to farmers caused by international trade policies. We should assess all trade agreements, including the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), for their impact on farmers and farmworkers.

We support the goal of free and equitable trade; however, the poorest countries need appropriate flexibility to use protective measures to safeguard food security and achieve income stability for their farmers and farmworkers. It is important that trade agreements give impoverished nations an opportunity to use protections when necessary, including tariffs, subsidies, and other support mechanisms, to build their agricultural sectors so that poor farmers can continue to produce and market staple food crops, can support their families, and can sustain viable rural communities. The strength and success of the U.S. agricultural system was achieved in part through policies that provided extensive support for U.S. farmers over the years. We must find ways for the governments of the United States and other developed countries to adopt trade policies that provide special access to their markets for farmers from the world's most desperately poor nations and to take steps to promote stable prices for agricultural goods. Initiatives for fairer





trade should be supported so that trade relationships benefit poor communities, minimize exploitation through just remuneration, preserve local culture, and promote environmentally sustainable farming practices. In some instances, developing countries, in trading agricultural goods among themselves, could benefit from a mutual reduction in trade barriers.

To protect the health and well-being of all people, trade policies should provide consistent food safety standards that are open to public review, are based on internationally accepted scientific criteria, and are subject to a neutral dispute resolution process. This will ensure that all farmers are subject to the same standards. To promote adoption of consistent standards throughout the world, developed nations should provide technical and other assistance to poorer countries.

All people have a basic human right to a sufficient amount of safe food to sustain life. Food aid is an essential response to people who do not have access to adequate food. We encourage more affluent nations, including the United States, to generously respond to requests for food aid and to focus their aid on meeting the needs of hungry people, as determined by the countries in need.

Food aid should not be a means for developed nations to dispose of surplus commodities, create new markets for agricultural products, displace local food production, or distort world food prices. Food aid programs should not foster dependency among recipient countries and should be designed in ways that advance broader food security strategies for poor nations. Affluent nations and international institutions should support and assist developing countries in creating strategies to ensure food security for their people. The governments of developing nations have an obligation to do everything reasonably possible to overcome hunger. This requires promoting agricultural development, curbing corruption, and ensuring that food aid actually goes to the hungry. Sometimes, providing financial assistance to enable food aid recipients to buy food in regional or international markets might be the best option. The decision to accept food aid has been complicated by the development of new technologies that alter the genetic make-up of some grains and other foods. Because some of the world's developed nations will not trade with countries whose goods are genetically altered, accepting genetically modified food aid may jeopardize a poor country's access to important markets. If genetically altered seeds from food aid are accidentally planted, a country's crops may become genetically altered and may no longer be accepted by some trading partners. Donors should fully inform developing countries when food aid contains genetically modified crops. We respect the right of sovereign nations to make decisions about accepting food aid based on their assessment of the risks to health, the environment, and access to international markets. However, when the threat of starvation places human lives at risk, and there are no feasible alternatives, food aid must be made available to hungry people. In these situations, donors should make every effort to ensure that local crops are not affected and local concerns are addressed by milling food-aid grains and other measures.

In an increasingly globalized economy, multinational corporations provide farmers throughout the world with seeds, credit, marketing support, transportation, food, and more. While global access to products and technologies can bring important benefits, it also involves risks that control over these goods can become concentrated in the hands of a few powerful corporations and that local control over farming practices may be lost. The policies of governments and international institutions should promote fair competition in the agricultural sector while protecting the interests of small farm owners.

IV. EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES



New agricultural technologies are being developed and used that promise to increase farm productivity, cut costs, create hardier crops, reduce the need for pesticides, and enhance nutrition. Research into a wide range of new agricultural technologies should be pursued, but with caution and prudence. Public investments in research should be expanded, focusing on opportunities to help the world's poorest people and nations. For

example, if new technologies make it possible to successfully grow crops on marginal land and in adverse weather conditions in poor regions of the world, they could contribute significantly to improved nutrition and economic security for the people of those regions. Developed countries also need to assist developing countries in strengthening their capacity to monitor and regulate genetically modified organisms on their own.

Looking beyond research to the actual use of new technologies, we see substantial fears and significant polarization, especially about genetically modified products. Some support the use of genetically modified foods, noting that they are consumed widely in the United States with no apparent negative impacts on human health and the environment. Others believe there has not been enough time to conduct thorough research on the long-term health and environmental effects. We join the Holy See in raising two key concerns: the urgent need to focus new developments in agricultural technology on reducing poverty and hunger, and the importance of ensuring open discussion and participation in decision making regarding the development and use of genetically modified products.⁹ With these priorities in mind, we believe that use of genetically altered products should proceed cautiously with serious and urgent attention to their possible human, health, and environmental impacts. Even if

Global Agriculture: What Is Happening to Hungry People and Farmers Around the World?

Scale. In 2001, 55% percent of all workers in developing countries were employed in agriculture;¹ 70% of the poor in developing countries live in rural areas and derive livelihoods from agriculture directly or indirectly.² Among the developing regions, Africa has the greatest concentration of low-income, food-deficit countries that cannot produce enough food to feed their populations and cannot afford to make up the deficit through imports.³ Also, in sub-Saharan Africa, women produce up to 80% of basic food products.⁴

Hunger. An estimated 840 million people worldwide are malnourished,⁵ despite the fact that farmers globally produce 2,800 calories of food per person per day;⁶ enough to adequately nourish everyone on the planet. Further, 30,000 children die of hunger and related causes daily; 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1 per day, 70% of whom are found in rural areas.⁷

Trade/Aid. The United States is the largest exporter of agricultural goods in the world.⁸ Three companies account for 81% of corn exports and 65% of soybeans; four companies account for 60% of the grain terminals.⁹ In 2001, the developed countries gave six times as much in subsidies to their own farmers as they gave in total foreign aid to poor countries. These agricultural subsidies cause "direct harm to poor countries," because they lower the prices poor farmers would otherwise receive for their products.¹⁰ U.S. global food aid in 2001 accounted for about 60% of all food donated worldwide.¹¹

1 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *Mobilizing the Political Will and Resources to Banish World Hunger*, prepared for World Summit Plus Five (2002), 63.

2 FAO, *State of Food Insecurity in the World 2002*, 12.

3 International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), *Drylands: A Call to Action* (1998), 6.

4 FAO, *Gender and Agriculture*, <http://www.fao.org/gender/en/agrib4-e.htm> (accessed November 2003).

5 FAO, *State of Food Insecurity in the World 2001*.

6 FAO, *World Agriculture: Towards 2015-2030* (2003).

7 *Mobilizing the Political Will*, no. 3.3.

8 U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Food and Agricultural Policy: Taking Stock of the New Century* (September 2001), 40.

9 William Heffernan, *Multi-National Concentrated Food Processing and Marketing Systems and the Farm Crisis*, 11. A paper presented to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, February 14-19, 2002.

10 United Nations Development Report, *Human Development Report* (2003), 155-156.

11 World Food Program, "Global Food Aid Flows," *Food Aid Monitor* (2001).



genetically modified foods are safe to consume, they can still pose environmental risks that must be managed. Scientists in developed countries have emphasized the need to anticipate and manage the possible effects of genetic modification on the environment. Developing countries may need financial and technical assistance in building their capacity to monitor and address the environmental risk associated with genetic engineering.

Debate about genetically modified food aid reflects two key moral questions: Who will decide about the use and availability of these new technologies? And who will benefit from them? Some individuals and countries seek to reject genetically modified goods. They have major concerns about health and environmental risks. They also fear that other crops will be affected by genetically modified seeds, resulting in the loss of some trading partners. We accept their right to assess the risks and to choose to reject these products as long as lives are not put at risk.

Others are concerned that the benefits of new technologies and genetic engineering will not be made widely available. They fear that farmers will become dependent on seeds patented by a few companies, which could provide returns for investors at the expense of producers. Both public and private

entities have an obligation to use their property, including intellectual and scientific property, to promote the good of all people. To ensure that the benefits of emerging technologies are widely shared, patents should be granted for the minimum time and under the minimum conditions necessary to provide incentives for innovation. Agricultural products and processes developed over time by indigenous people should not be patented by outsiders without consent and fair compensation. To ensure that poor countries can take advantage of new technologies, strategies and programs will be needed to help transfer these technologies affordably. The driving force in this debate should not be profit or ideology, but how hunger can be overcome, how poor farmers can be assisted, and how people participate in the debate and decisions. (See data box “New Technologies, New Questions: What Are the Opportunities and Problems in New Agricultural Technologies?”)

V. STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION

Protecting God’s creation must be a central goal of agricultural policies. We support policies that promote soil conservation, improve water quality, protect wildlife, and maintain biodiversity. Government resources should be targeted to farms and ranches that practice environmentally sound agriculture. We urge farmers to minimize their use of pesticides and other chemicals and, where they are used, to take strong measures to protect themselves, agricultural workers, and their families from exposure. Farmworkers who may be exposed to these hazards need greater access to information to prevent and treat exposure. Government policies and regulations should seek to reduce the use of toxic pesticides and promote safer alternatives. When farmworkers or their families are injured or become ill due to exposure, adequate health care and benefits should be made available.

Catholic teaching about the stewardship of creation leads us to question certain farming practices, such as the operation of massive, confined, animal-feeding operations. We believe that these operations should be carefully



Agriculture and Environment: What Is Happening to Land and Water?

Scale of Soil Erosion. From 1982 to 1995, erosion on cropland and land enrolled in the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program declined 38%. Since 1995, erosion in the United States has leveled off, but 29% of cropland is still determined to be excessively eroding. This severe erosion affects general water and air quality.¹

An estimated 23% of all usable land globally is affected by degradation, and soil erosion is a major factor. Causes include overgrazing, deforestation, and excessive use of chemicals.² In Africa, 25% of the land is prone to water erosion and 22% to wind.³

Scale of Water Needs. The usable portion of all freshwater in the globe is less than 1%. More than 50% of all runoff occurs in Asia and South America. About one-third of the world's population lives in countries suffering moderate to high water stress. Some 80 countries, constituting 40% of the world's population, suffered from serious water shortages in the 1990s. While the number of those served with improved water quality grew, 1.1 billion people still lack access to safe water. By 2020, water use is expected to increase by 40%, and 17% more water will be needed for agriculture, particularly irrigated agriculture.⁴ In the United States, agriculture relies on groundwater for 62% of its irrigated farmland.⁵

1 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 1997 *National Resources Inventory: Highlights*, rev. ed. (December 2000), 2.

2 United Nations Environment Program, *Global Environmental Outlook 3* (2002), 64.

3 *Global Environmental Outlook*, 71.

4 *Global Environmental Outlook*, 150-152.

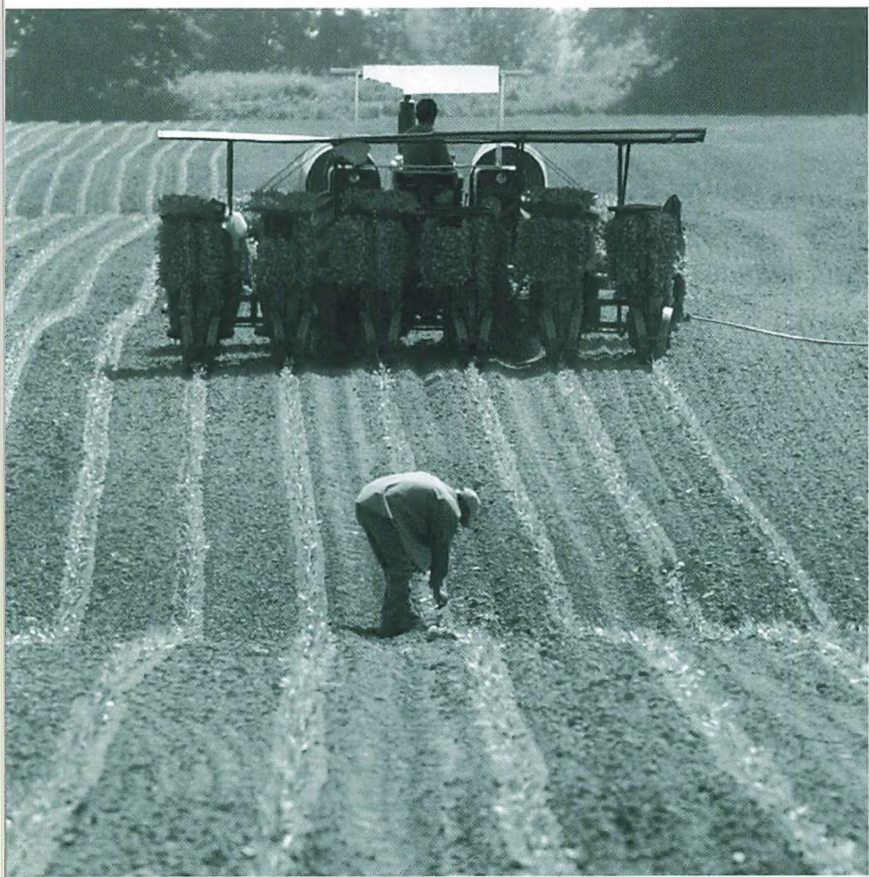
5 *Global Environmental Outlook*, 170.

regulated and monitored so that environmental risks are minimized and animals are treated as creatures of God.

Another important concern is the practice of focusing large acreages on one crop or a few strains of a crop. While economies of scale are associated with this practice, so are environmental risks. Unless managed properly, this limited approach to production can lead to depletion of the soil and destruction of fertile lands. This practice should be carefully assessed in light of its environmental impacts.

Final Note

Agriculture is not just another economic sector. It is about food and hunger, the way we treat those who grow and harvest our food and fiber, and what kind of nation and world we are shaping. Agriculture and rural life, farmers and farmworkers have been longstanding concerns for our Conference, but the forces of increasing concentration in agriculture and increasing globalization in our world are raising new questions that have significant human dimensions and ethical implications. We hope these reflections will contribute to a broader dialogue about the moral dimensions of agriculture and to renewed efforts to advance the dignity of farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers.



NOTES

- 1 Cf. National Conference of Catholic Bishops/United States Catholic Conference, *Report of the Ad Hoc Task Force on Food, Agriculture, and Rural Concerns* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1988); United States Catholic Conference, *Food Policy in a Hungry World: The Links That Bind Us Together* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1989).
- 2 Among the key national Catholic organizations are the Catholic Committee on Appalachia, Catholic Extension, Catholic Relief Services, National Catholic Rural Life Conference, and the USCCB Catholic Campaign for Human Development and Secretariat for Home Missions.
- 3 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* (November 24, 2002), no. 3, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20021124_politica_en.html (accessed in November 2003).
- 4 *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, no. 6.
- 5 USCCB, *Economic Justice for All: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1997): "U.S. food policy has had a parallel goal of keeping the consumer cost of food low. As a result, Americans today spend less of their disposable income on food than people in any other industrialized country. . . . while low food prices benefit consumers who are left with additional income to spend on other goods, these pricing policies put pressure on farmers to increase output and hold down costs. This has led them to replace human labor with cheaper energy, expand farm size to employ new technologies favoring larger scale operations, neglect soil and water conservation, underpay farmworkers, and oppose farmworker unionization" (nos. 219-220).
- 6 Cf. USCCB, *A Place at the Table: A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God's Children* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2002).
- 7 Catholic social teaching is a rich tradition that is rooted in the Scripture and the lived experience of the people of God. It has been developed in the writings of church leaders through the ages and has most recently been articulated through a tradition of modern papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. For a more thorough discussion of the themes identified here and their roots, see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000); *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1999); the USCCB website

www.usccb.org; the Vatican website www.vatican.va. Also for previous statements of the Catholic bishops on agriculture—namely, the report of the *Ad Hoc Task Force on Food, Agriculture, and Rural Concerns* (1988) and *Food Policy in a Hungry World: The Links That Bind Us Together* (1989)—contact USCCB Publishing at 800-235-8722 or check the USCCB website.

- 8 John Paul II, *On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum (Centesimus Annus)* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1991), no. 48.
- 9 Cf. Archbishop Renato R. Martino, Address at the Ministerial Conference on Science and Technology in Agriculture, Sacramento, California, June 23-25, 2003.

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